Physical Division of India–I

Objectives

In this lesson, you will learn about

- Physical divisions of India
- The Northern Mountains
- Importance of the Himalayas
- The Northern Plains
- Importance of the Plains

You have already learnt in your previous class that there are various kinds of landforms present on the surface of the Earth. Every continent and country has mountain ranges, plains, plateaus, deserts and rivers. India too has its own share of these landforms. These are called **physical features**.

When a single type of landform or physical feature predominates or extends over a large area, it forms a **physical division**. Usually, these physical divisions show a similarity in their climatic, soil and natural vegetation characteristics. Thus, such a region can also be termed as a **natural region**. In a natural region, due to the similarities in the physical characteristics, the human activities that develop are also somewhat similar. For example, in the flat river-plains, people usually practise agriculture, whereas on the mountains areas, animal rearing is common.

In this chapter, we shall discuss, the first two physical divisions, namely the **Northern Mountains** and the **Northern Plains** in detail.

Physical Divisions of India

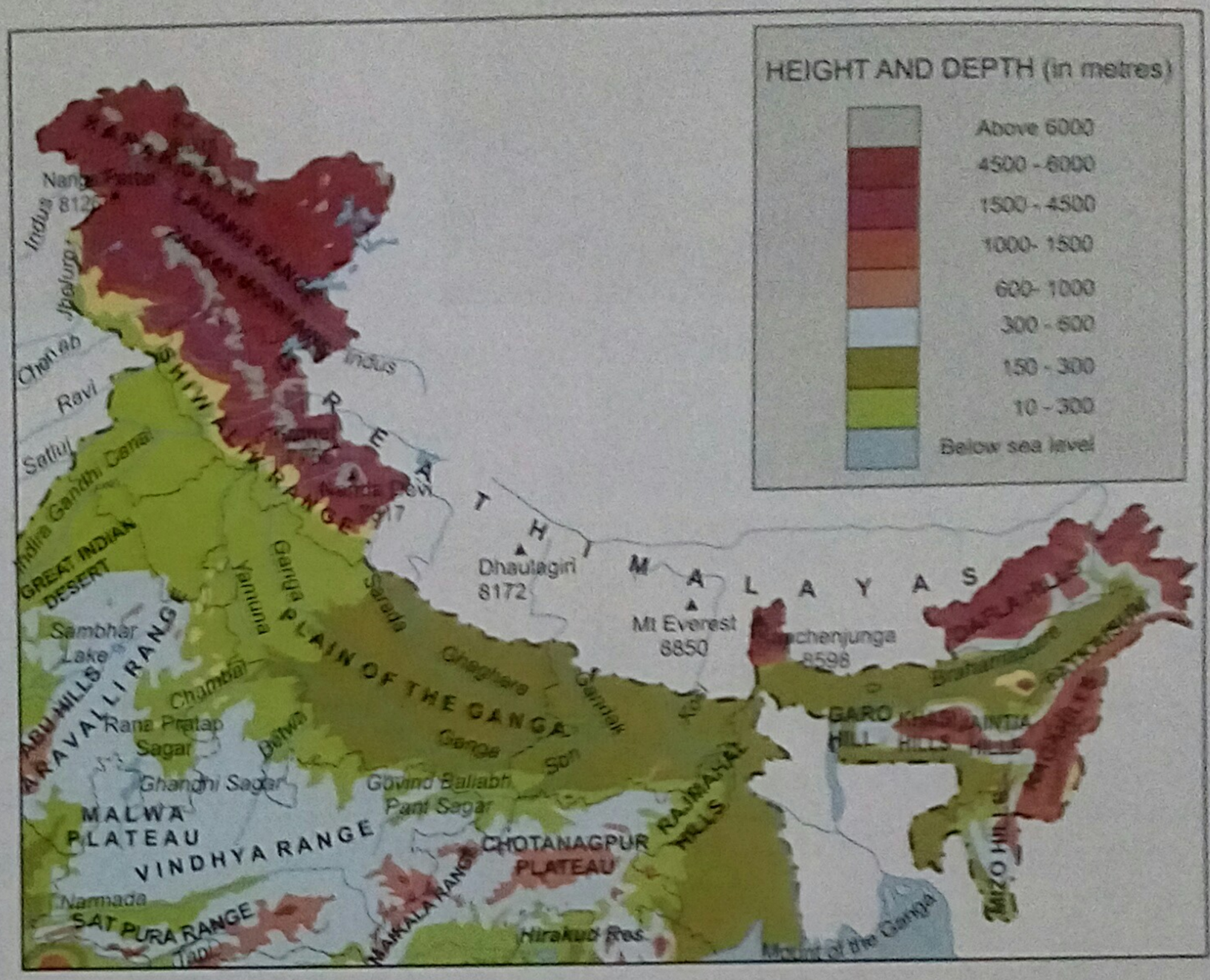
- The Northern Mountains
- The Northern Plains
- The Peninsular or Central Plateau
- The Thar Desert
- The Coastal Plains

Physical map of India

The Northern Mountains

Location and Extent

The lofty ranges forming a wall across the northern borders of India are not only the **highest** in the world but also the **youngest**. They form an arc stretching from Jammu and Kashmir in the west to Arunachal Pradesh in the east for about **2,500 km**. The principal range of this division are the **Himalayas**, which means the **abode of snow**. The northern mountains also include other ranges such as the **Karakoram**, **Zanskar** and the **Ladakh**. The world's second highest peak, **Mt K2** or the **Godwin Austin**, lies in the Karakoram range. The region beyond the Great Himalayas is cold, barren and bleak. It is known as the **Trans-Himalayas**.



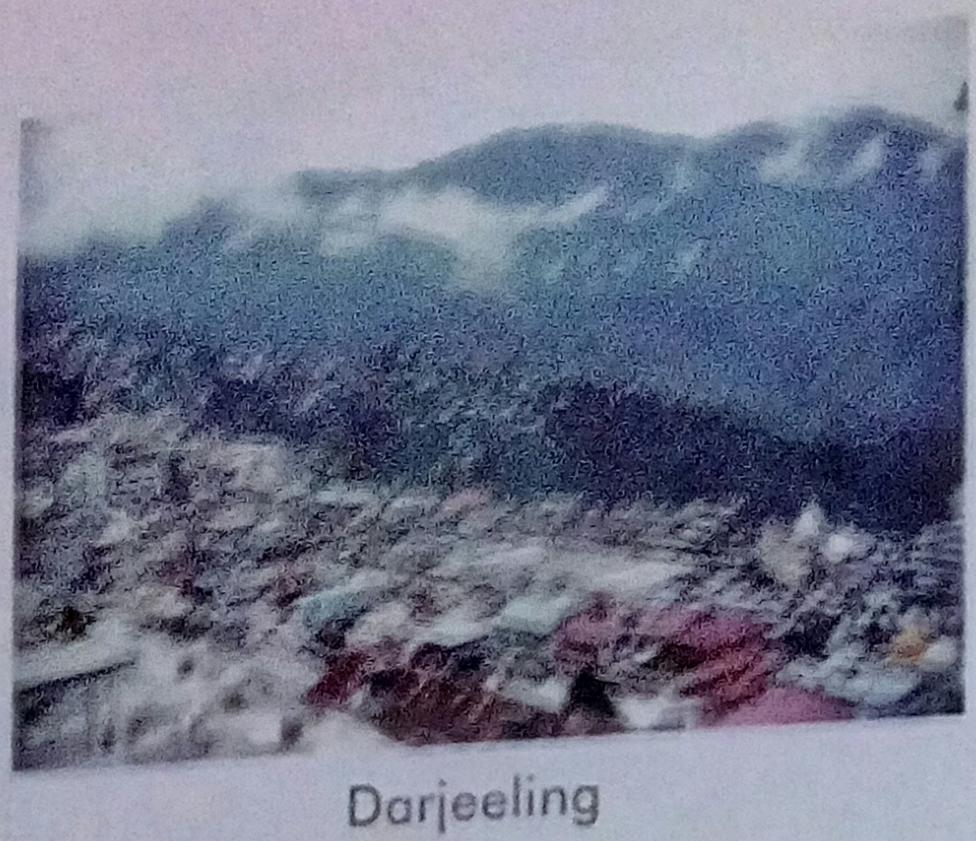
The Himalayas

Origin

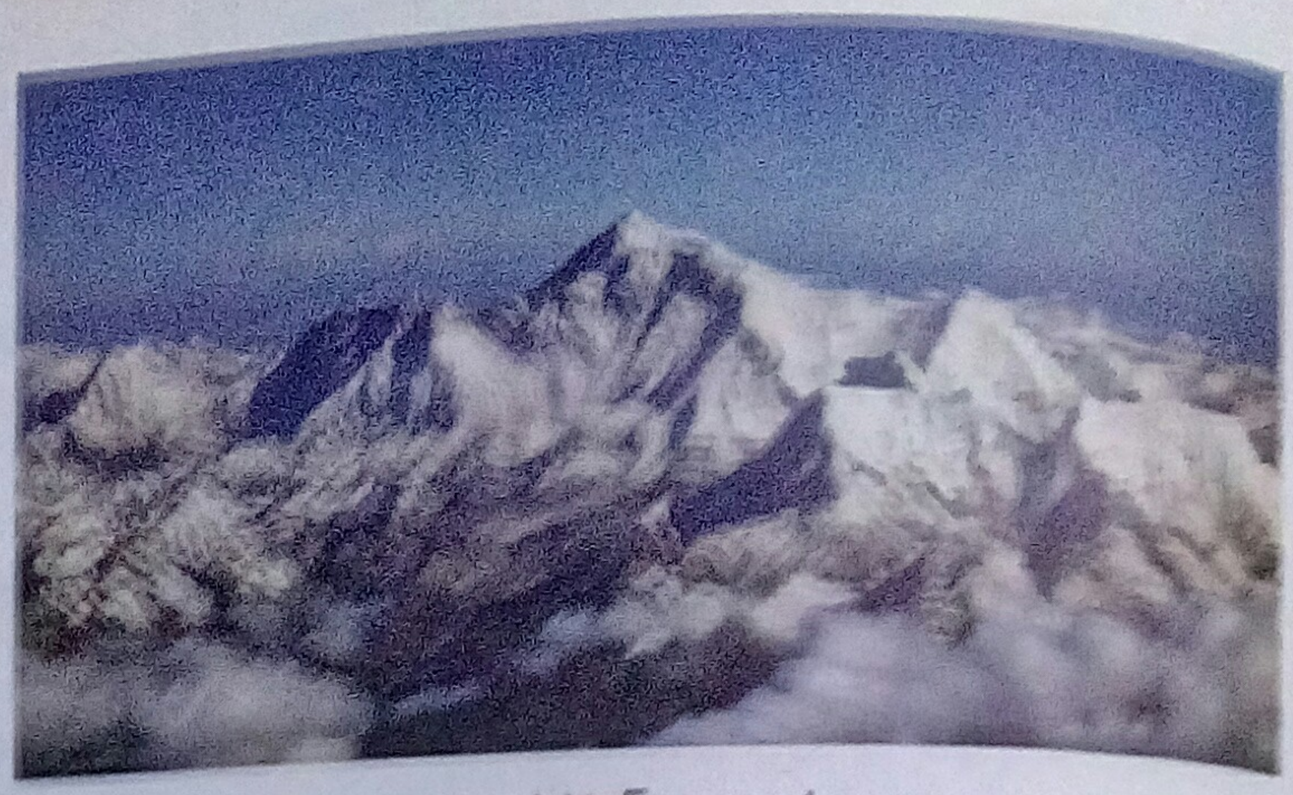
How do you think these mighty ranges have been formed? Well, long, long ago there existed a shallow sea, called the **Tethys Sea**, which existed in the place where the Himalayas are today. Later on, due to massive earth movements, the sediments on this sea were squeezed or compressed giving rise to huge **'folds'**. These huge folds are, in fact, the mountain ranges of the north, which are known as **fold mountains**.

Sub-Divisions

The Himalayas are sub-divided into three parallel ranges, on the basis of their height. Starting from the Indian side, the lowest range comes first.



Darjeeling

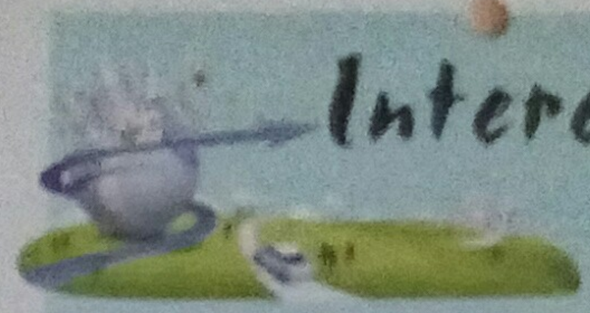


Mt Everest

The Three Ranges

1. Outer Himalayas or Shivaliks	2. Middle/Lesser Himalayas or Himachal	3. Greater/Inner Himalayas or Himadri
Average altitude is less than 1,200 m	Average altitude is about 4,500 m	Average altitude is about 6,000 m
Special features • It is not a continuous range but merges in the east with the Middle Himalayas. • They are made up of loose and soft broken-down rocks. • Also known as the foothills, they are covered with dense forests and marshes commonly known as the 'Terai'. • Long valleys known as 'doons' exist here. Dehradun is situated in a doon, or valley like this.	**Special features** • Beautiful hills station like Mussourie, Shimla Nainital and Darjeeling are situated here which attract tourists. • The slopes are covered with dense forests in most areas and lush grasses in some. • This area is also famous for its picturesque valleys like the Kulu valley in Himachal Pradesh and the Kashmir valley.	**Special features** • These mighty range is snow covered throughout the year. • The peaks are sharp and the slopes, steep. • Mt Everest (8,850 m), the world's highest peak is located here. Other peaks are the Kanchenjunga, Nanda Devi and Nanga Parbat. • Important glaciers exists here which give rise to many rivers. • The Gangotri glacier and the Yamunotri glacier give rise to the Ganga and the Yamuna respectively.

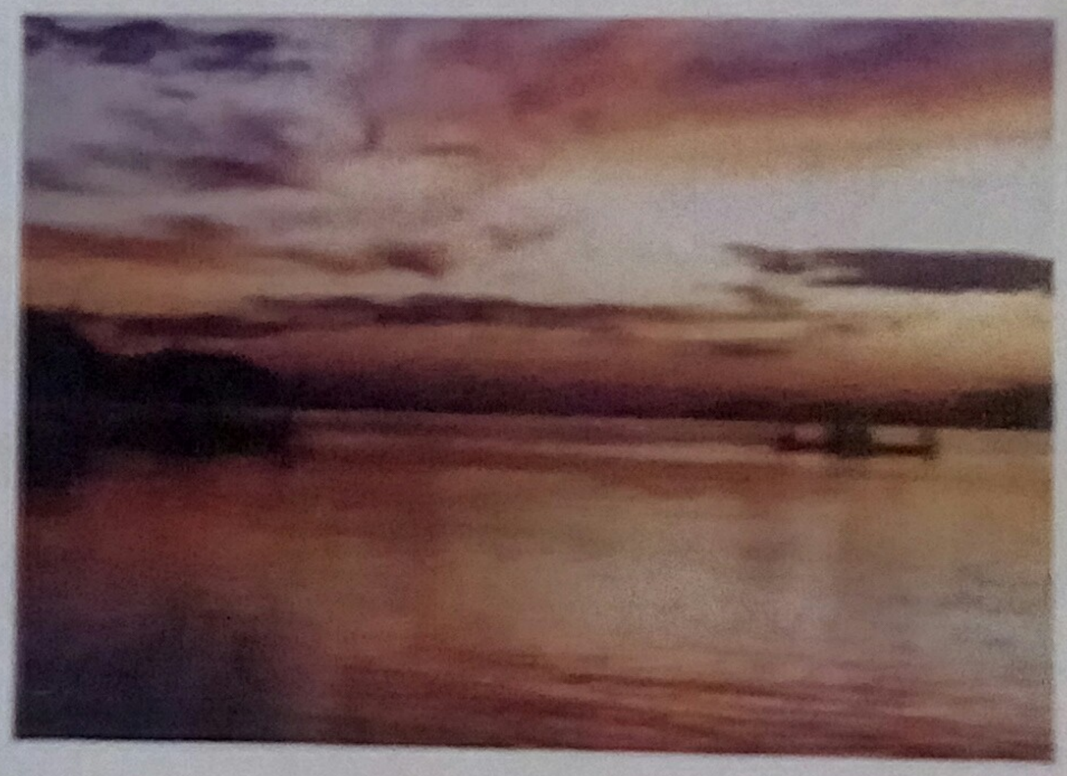
Towards the east, the Himalayas bend southwards and extend into Myanmar. A number of small hills exist here, namely the **Garo, Khasi, Jaintia, Naga** and **Mizo Hills**. These are collectively known as the **Purvanchal**.



The highest peak of the Himalayas, Mt Everest lies in Nepal, whereas the second highest peak, Mt Kanchenjuga lies in Sikkim in India.

Importance of the Himalayas

- The Himalayas act as a barrier or wall in the north, stopping the cold winds from Central Asia from to entering into India. Thus, our winters are not so cold or harsh.
- The Himalayas also stop the rain bearing monsoon winds, coming from the surrounding seas into India, from passing over further northwards towards Tibet. This ensures that all the rain falls over India during the rainy season.
- The snow covered peaks give rise to rivers which flow throughout the year, due to the melting snow. The Ganga, Indus and Brahmaputra are good examples.
- The densely forested slopes of the Himalayas are home to a variety of birds and animals.



Brahmaputra River

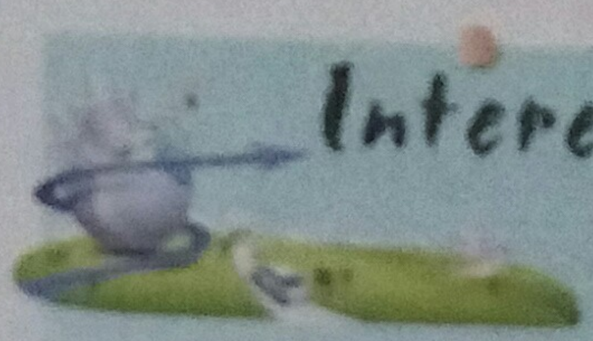
The Northern Plains

Location and Extent

These vast plains lie just south of the Northern Mountains stretching for about **2,500 km** from Punjab in the west to Assam in the east.

Origin

The plains have been formed by the **deposition of sediments or silt** brought down by the great rivers



Rivers which are snowfed flow throughout the year are called **perennial**.

—Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra and their tributaries over million of years. They are **flat** or **level** and very **fertile**. The fertile silt is known as **alluvium** and so these plains are alluvial plains.

Sub-Divisions

The Punjab Plains	The Ganga Plains	The Brahmaputra Plains
• These plains are actually a part of the Indus plains which lie mostly in Pakistan. Only the Satluj, Ravi and Beas form these plains. • They lie in north-western part of India.	• These are formed by the Ganga and its tributaries, namely Yamuna, Gandak, Ghagra, Gomti, Kosi and the Son. • These plains occupy the central part.	• These are formed by the Brahmaputra and its tributaries. • These lie in the eastern part of India.

The plains extend slightly southwards, where the Ganga and the Brahmaputra meet to form the largest **delta** in the world. The major part of this delta lies in Bangladesh and a small portion lies in West Bengal. These are covered by dense forests where the **Sundari** tree is very common. Hence they are also known as the **Sundarbans**.

Think Tank!

Did you know that the Sunderbans are famous for the national animal of India? Find out the special name given to these animals.

Importance of the Plains

- These plains are the most densely populated regions of India. This is due to the presence of the flat fertile plains, perennial rivers and favourable climate.
- The flat fertile plains have enabled people to grow a variety crops of since the earliest times and thus has earned it the name of the **food bowl of India**.

Agriculture: Paddy field

- The level plains have encouraged the building of roads and railways, helping people to move from place to place.
- Lastly, the wide perennial rivers not only provide water for cultivation but also can be used to generate electricity and for navigation.

LET'S REVISE

- A single type of landform spread over a large area forms a physical division.
- Physical divisions with similar soil, climate, vegetation and human activities make a natural region.
- The physical divisions of India are the Northern Mountains, Northern Plains, Central Plateau, Thar Desert and the Coastal Plains.
- The Northern Mountains consist of three parallel ranges the Shivaliks, the Himachal and the Himadri.
- The Northern Plains consist of the Punjab Plains, the Ganga Plains and the Brahmaputra Plains.